

Amnesty International UK

BRIEFING



July 2025 The Trump Administration and Human Rights

Introduction

We are at a critical juncture for human rights and international justice. Thanks to the "Trump-effect," human rights abusers are being emboldened to roll back rights and undermine the systems designed to protect and advance them.

All political leaders who meet with President Trump during his upcoming visits to the UK have a duty to challenge his anti-rights agenda and urge him to reverse a wide range of devastating decisions that are gutting international human rights norms and protections.

The president and his administration have targeted and undermined vital U.S. and international systems, institutions, and initiatives designed to make ours a safer and fairer world, using authoritarian tactics, policies and rhetoric, and turbocharging harmful trends already present. This all-out assault on multilateralism, asylum, racial and gender justice, global justice, global health and life-saving climate action threatens decades of painstaking work to build up and advance universal human rights and risks an acceleration of such practices globally

Domestically in the United States, President Trump has weaponised the government to punish and silence dissent, creating a climate of fear and division and undermining the rule of law. He has targeted the rights of the LGBTI community and immigrants while further eroding access to sexual and reproductive healthcare. His mass deportation machine has unlawfully expelled and disappeared Venezuelan immigrants to El Salvador under the Alien Enemies Act.

Internationally, the Trump administration's human rights and international law-averse foreign policy approach including military action, tariffs, sanctions, and threats has caused, chaos, disruption and confusion around the world; and the abrupt and sweeping suspension of US foreign aid is placing millions of lives and human rights at risk.

Summary of calls

Amnesty International urges all UK political leaders to challenge the US President's anti-rights agenda and call on him to reverse decisions that threaten human right progress, specifically to:

- **Engage positively with the Human Rights Council (HRC), the World Health Organisation, the Paris Climate Agreement and the International Criminal Court to ensure the respect, protection and fulfilment of international human rights standards:** By officially withdrawing from the Human Rights Council, the World Health Organisation and the Paris Climate Agreement and imposing sanctions on the International Criminal Court and the UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian Territory, the Trump Administration's actions are having a profound impact on human rights including intensifying efforts to undermine global mechanisms for justice and accountability.
- **Reinstate civilian harm mitigation efforts:** From shrinking offices aimed at reducing civilian harm caused by U.S. military operations to reversing executive orders aimed at ensuring the U.S.'s arms transfers do not contribute to violations of international law, the Trump Administration has demonstrated a dangerous disregard for the lives of civilians endangered by armed conflicts.
- **Reinstate US Foreign assistance:** Sweeping and abrupt cuts to foreign aid have had a catastrophic impact on global humanitarian, development and human rights efforts. These cuts are not just financial—they represent an abandonment of the U.S.'s stated commitments to human rights, public health, and global peace and security.
- **Respect due process and uphold international law in relation to immigration and asylum:** Mass deportations, enforced disappearances under the Alien Enemies Act, family separations, and harsh restrictions on the right to asylum have violated international law. These actions have torn communities apart and created a reality in which immigrants, including those who have come to the U.S. seeking safety, are pushed into the shadows, living in fear.

Retreat from Multilateral Bodies

- **There has been an unprecedented abandonment of global human rights leadership under the Trump Administration**
- **The U.S has officially withdrawn from the HRC, WHO and Paris Climate Agreement, imposed sanctions on ICC officials and undermined human rights progress at the UN**
- **These actions will have a profound impact on human rights globally.**

Human Rights Council, WHO and Paris Climate Agreement

Funding support for HRC-mandated fact-finding missions and monitoring mechanisms is vital to providing human rights oversight in crisis situations such as those in Venezuela, Ethiopia, Sudan, Ukraine, and Syria. In withdrawing from the World Health Organization (WHO), the U.S. has hampered a global response to emerging and existing global health threats - potentially harming people globally.

In withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement, the U.S. is forfeiting the fight against one of the most pervasive threats to human rights today and abdicating its responsibility to the rest of the world as the number one historic polluter. Indeed, 2024 marked a grim landmark, with average global temperatures exceeding pre-industrial levels by 1.5 degrees Celsius. The climate crisis will exacerbate and instigate famine, displacement and other humanitarian crises, ill-health, poverty and homelessness across the globe, with the impacts falling disproportionately on marginalized communities. In addition, several executive orders seek to expand fossil fuel production, which will cause decades of fossil fuel pollution, harming community health and worsening climate change.

ICC sanctions

The sanctions against ICC officials send a chilling message that the U.S. is willing to undermine justice and accountability for the atrocities and crimes under international law committed globally.

On 6 February 2025, Donald Trump issued an Executive Order authorizing sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan. This Executive Order is intended to stop the ICC from undertaking its independent mandate. It also poses a significant threat to the ICC and its staff. UN experts strongly condemned the move, calling it “an attack on global rule of law” that undermines international justice.

This Executive Order is similar to one issued by President Trump towards the end of his first term in 2020, which was later lifted by President Biden. Trump’s new executive action is a direct response to the ICC’s efforts to hold Israeli nationals accountable for alleged crimes under international law in Palestine. In November 2024, the court issued arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, as well as al-Qassam brigades commander Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri, on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

On 5 June, the US additionally sanctioned four ICC judges who are overseeing the 2020 case of an alleged war crime in Afghanistan by US and Afghan military forces, and the 2024 ICC arrest warrants issued against Israeli Prime Minister and the former Defence Minister.

On 9 July, the US Secretary of State imposed sanctions on the UN Human Rights Council’s Special Rapporteur on occupied Palestinian Territory for engaging with the ICC.

By imposing sanctions on the ICC, the Trump Administration is undermining efforts to deliver justice, not only to Afghans and Palestinians, but to victims of the most serious crimes everywhere. This includes people in Burundi, Cote d’Ivoire, Darfur (Sudan), DRC, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Philippines, Ukraine and Venezuela, where the ICC is currently conducting investigations or has issued arrest warrants.

Undermining Human Rights at the UN

President Trump's executive order officially withdrawing the US from various UN entities also mandated a 180-day review of all international intergovernmental organizations of which the U.S. is a member and to which it provides any type of funding or other support. It also mandated a review of all conventions and treaties to which the United States is party, to determine which organizations, conventions, and treaties are purportedly contrary to the interests of the United States; and whether such organizations, conventions, or treaties can be reformed.

The Administration has also pushed efforts to challenge even the most basic and accepted human rights terms previously agreed at the UN. While the 10 March adoption of a declaration on gender equality at the UN Commission on the Status of Women ended up as a win for human rights, the U.S. created considerable opposition and requested that references to "gender-responsiveness" be deleted throughout, as well as language regarding multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Co-facilitators refused to concede to the U.S.

Moreover in February this year, unlike in the past, the U.S. (joining a small group of member states that included Russia, North Korea, Belarus, Nicaragua, and Sudan) cast a negative vote on the Ukraine- and EU-drafted text of a UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine and emphasizing the need for accountability for crimes under international law and justice for all victims. The U.S. also successfully introduced a

competing resolution totalling barely seven lines of text that made no mention of Russia's aggression, the human rights and international humanitarian law violations stemming from the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, or the need for accountability.

The US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's announced sanctions against the Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Francesca Albanese solely for her fulfilment of functions as an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council. Such measures are an assault on the UN human rights system and risk other states adopting similar measures when they disagree with an independent UN expert.

While retreating from multilateralism, President Trump has also pushed forward with unilateral plans to compound the violations that have been committed in Gaza. During Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's first visit under the new Administration on 4 February, 2025, President Trump made remarks that the U.S. government will "take over the Gaza Strip," advocating for what would amount to forcible deportation of almost 2 million Palestinians.

Retreating from civilian harm mitigation efforts

- **Civilian Protection Centre gutted**
- **Military lawyers responsible for ensuring compliance with international law fired**
- **Pause on shipment of 2000lb bombs to Israel lifted**

Critical systems put in place in recent years to reduce and better respond to civilian harm caused by U.S. lethal actions abroad are under attack. In March, the Washington Post reported that the Civilian Protection Centre of Excellence that grew out of initiatives started by President Trump's first defense secretary, James Mattis, was being gutted. That followed CBS reporting that President Trump quietly "rolled back constraints on American commanders to authorise airstrikes and special operation raids outside conventional battlefields," a policy shift that, according to an expert quoted in the report, "inherently raises the risk of flawed decisions and unintended civilian casualties." Defense Secretary Hegseth's firing of the top military lawyers responsible for ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law is further indication of the Administration's actions designed to undermine consideration of civilian harm and international law in its military planning.

On 25 January, President Trump announced that he was lifting the pause put in place by the Biden Administration on a shipment of 2,000 lb. bombs to Israel, bombs that can destroy an entire city block. On 7 February, the State Department broke with a long-standing norm and disregarded a congressional hold put in place by a member of Congress to rush more than \$8 billion in weapons to Israel, despite the fact that it continues its genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. As part of the congressional oversight process, members of Congress can place a hold on an arms transfer if it raises significant concerns. On 2 March, Secretary Rubio invoked "emergency authorities," following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Secretary Antony Blinken, to completely bypass Congress and send an additional \$4 billion in weapons to Israel. The Administration is thus giving a full stamp of approval for the Israeli government's unlawful actions and crimes under international law, including genocide, committed in Gaza.

Dismantling U.S Foreign Assistance

- **In March, Secretary Marco Rubio confirmed that he had terminated 83% of USAID awards.**
- **Funding cuts to shelters and groups that provide essential services have been widespread and devastating.**
- **President Trump's Executive order prohibiting U.S. funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is unconscionable during Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.**

The decision by US authorities to largely end foreign assistance is devastating. Terminations of foreign assistance programmes have had immediate, significant, and detrimental impacts for people around the world.

For example, In Afghanistan, 12 out of 23 community resources centres, which provided approximately 120,000 returning and internally displaced Afghans with housing, food assistance, legal assistance and referrals to healthcare providers, have been shut down. In Costa Rica, local organizations helping asylum seekers and migrants, many from neighbouring Nicaragua, are forced to scale back or close food, shelter, and psychosocial programs.

On 4 February, President Trump issued an Executive Order prohibiting U.S. funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA is the backbone of the humanitarian response for nearly two million Palestinians in Gaza, providing indispensable food, water, medical aid, education and shelter. Blocking funding during Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza is especially cruel and unconscionable. President Trump's reinstatement of this ban for U.S. funding for UNRWA, which extends the policy of the Biden Administration, exacerbates the suffering of Palestinians.

Human Rights in the United States

- **In the U.S the Trump Administration has weaponised the government to punish and silence dissent.**
- **The Administration has withheld funding from colleges and universities, limited journalists' access to the White House, and arrested and threatened to deport students exercising their right to freedom of expression.**
- **The Administration has targeted immigrants, racialised people and attacked the rights of women and LGBTI people, directing particular vitriol towards trans people.**
- **Mass deportations, enforced disappearances under the Alien Enemies Act, family separations, and harsh restrictions on the right to asylum have violated international law. These actions have torn communities apart and created a reality in which immigrants, including those who have come to the U.S. seeking safety, are pushed into the shadows, living in fear.**

The Trump Administration has launched an aggressive attack on free expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, detaining and seeking to deport multiple students who have expressed views and solidarity with the rights of Palestinians. U.S immigration authorities unlawfully arrested and arbitrarily detained Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist and student organiser. At least nine other students are known to have been similarly targeted.

Shortly after his inauguration President Trump issued a series of executive orders rooted in white supremacist ideology and decided to pardon and release members of extremist groups like the Proud Boys and Oath keepers, further signalling the Administration's support for the white supremacist movement. One of his earliest orders eliminated Diversity, Equality and Inclusion programmes across federal agencies.

Under the Trump Administration the Federal Communications Commission has threatened license revocation and launched investigations into various news outlets against independent media organisations critical of the Administration

By reinstating cruel border policies, seeking to halt the U.S Refugee Admissions programmes and all access to asylum, and implementing raids targeting racialised immigrants across the U.S, the Administration has sought to turn the white nationalist 'Great Replacement Theory' into federal policy.

The Administration has undertaken multiple efforts to weaken sexual and reproductive rights, particularly the right to abortion. The Administration has removed government information and resources on abortion from the internet and begun to use language in executive orders aimed at normalising the concept of personhood at conception.

In an attempt to erase transgender people's existence under the law the Administration issued an executive order declaring it official U.S policy to recognise only two genders, "male and female". The President has instituted multiple executive orders directly attacking the rights of women and LGBTI people, directing particular vitriol towards trans people.

Conclusion

The perilous state of human rights in the United States comes on the heels of a global rise in authoritarian practices and attacks on international norms and institutions. The Trump Administration's anti-rights campaign is turbocharging harmful trends already present, gutting international human rights protections and endangering billions across the planet.

The consolidation of authoritarian practices is not inevitable and the International community must stand up to the President's anti-rights agenda. Political leaders in the UK must defend the international human rights system and be clear in their strong support for multilateralism, international justice and the bodies that support and enact those principles.